

## Stocking the Pond

The kinds and numbers of fish stocked in your pond will affect its success. Most ponds are stocked with a combination of a predator species and a forage species.

Fish for stocking usually are purchased from commercial producers. A list of the licensed commercial fish propagators in Ohio (Publication 196) may be obtained by writing to Publication Center, Ohio Department of Natural Resources, Fountain Square, Columbus, Ohio 43224. The offices of your county wildlife officer, county Extension agent, and the local Soil and Water Conservation District may also have a copy of this list.

Largemouth bass are the recommended predator species for stocking in Ohio ponds. Because bass feed almost exclusively on other fish, a forage species should be stocked as a food source. Bluegill and redear sunfish are the most commonly stocked forage species.

The least expensive size of fish for stocking is fingerlings, which are one to three inches long. When using fingerlings, stock 100 largemouth bass and 500 bluegills and/or redear sunfish per surface acre of water. Ponds less than one-half surface acre may be stocked at this rate or with 200 channel catfish fingerlings per acre only. Channel catfish fingerlings may be stocked with bass and a forage species in ponds one-half acre or larger. Stock at the rate of 100 per surface acre. When stocking with intermediate-sized fish or when supplementing the fish population in a pond, reduce numbers as follows: four to six inch bass: 50 per surface acre; two to four inch bluegills and/or redears: 250 per surface acre. These stocking rates for bluegills and redear sunfish are designed to supply the food needed by the bass and provide enough survival of the forage species to ensure spawning for a sustained food source. The rates for both predator and forage species should also produce enough adult fish to provide good recreational fishing.

Care should be taken when moving fish from one water source to another so that the water temperature difference does not exceed 5 degrees F. If the water temperature is greater than 5 degrees F, slowly add pond water to the fish container so that the temperature change is not greater than 2 degrees F per hour. If the fish are supplied to you in a plastic bag, float the bag in the pond for 30-45 minutes, then open and release.

Some pond owners want to fish for only largemouth bass and do not want bluegill or redear sunfish in their pond. For such a pond, golden shiners, bluntnose minnows, or fathead minnows may be stocked to provide food for the bass. These minnows should be stocked at the rate of 500 to 1,000 adults (2-1/2 to four inches in length) per surface acre.

Bass, bluegills, redear sunfish, and minnows will find suitable places to spawn in ponds without the addition of any special spawning structures. However, catfish require spawning structures that normally do not exist in a pond. If they do not reproduce, channel catfish must be restocked periodically to replace those harvested. In larger ponds, channel catfish may spawn if you provide eight inch or larger concrete tiles or rubber tires placed in areas where the water is two to five feet deep.

The Ohio Revised Code states that it is illegal to introduce exotic (not native) species of fish into public or private waters of the state. As a result, the stocking of vegetation-feeding fish was illegal until a triploid (not capable of reproducing) variety became available. Now triploid white amur (or grass carp) may be stocked in Ohio lakes and ponds for the control of aquatic vegetation. For more information on the triploid white amur, (see Biological Weed Control, page 18).

Pond owners often ask about the stocking of other fish species, particularly trout, in Ohio ponds. Most ponds will not support trout because the water gets too warm during the summer. Trout cannot survive in ponds where water temperatures exceed 75 degrees F to 80 degrees F for more than a few days. Ponds fed by springs may remain below these temperatures throughout the summer and may be suitable for trout. Crappie is another species many pond owners want to stock. This fish is unpredictable in ponds smaller than two acres. In larger ponds, crappie may be a desirable addition. As for perch and walleye, these lake species seldom do well and may compete with bass for forage. Finally, green sunfish, carp, rock bass, and bullheads are all undesirable. Their mistaken or accidental introduction into a pond from creeks or other impoundments can spoil your chances for good fishing. Years of experience by hundreds of Ohio pond owners suggest that a pond stocked with bass, bluegills and/or redear sunfish, and channel catfish provides the best fishing and the fewest problems.